THE FAST FOR UNDERSTANDING
A DAY BY DAY ACCOUNT

DAYS ONE AND TWO

Monday, July 11 and Tuesday July 12, 1994

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO. On Sunday, July 10, Dr. Mel White arrived in Colorado to begin his seven day Fast for Understanding in front of the world headquarters of James Dobson's Focus on the Family. That same afternoon in Denver, with Colorado's Governor Romer, Denver's Mayor Webb, and guest star Carol Channing on the state capitol steps, Dr. White announced the fast to thousands of cheering Coloradans gathered for the 1994 Pride Festival and Parade.

That evening, Mel was welcomed to Colorado Springs by leaders of Ground Zero, the Metropolitan Community Churches, P-FLAG, and La Guia, the Hispanic Caucus, co-sponsors of the Fast for Understanding. They presented him a copy of the story describing the fast in Saturday's *Gazette Telegraph* under the banner headline: Christian Gay Activist Plans Protest of Focus on the Family. "Just seeing 'Christian Gay Activist' in a newspaper headline is a kind of victory for all of us," Dr. White exclaimed. "White is targeting Focus and its founder, James Dobson, " the story began, "because he says the pro-family ministry's stand on homosexuality fosters hatred for gays."

Monday morning, July 11, Mel and his life partner, Gary Nixon, drove up Briargate Avenue in the sponsor's rented 28 foot Fleetwood RV and parked on public property directly in front of the massive home of Focus on the Family's $97 million yearly worldwide radio and print ministry. The fast site was decorated with a large banner reading: Fast for Understanding, Day 1; other colorful flags and banners including, Love Makes a Family, the theme for the coming week of events; and a brightly, stripped green awning over tables and chairs where Dr. White and other friends of the fast would gather daily to meet "with anybody who wants to meet a queer and see how normal we really are."

Day one of the Fast included a press conference, the first local television interview, two hour-long, live, national radio talk shows broadcast from the site, interviews with both city newspapers, with reporters from *Clarity*, a national magazine for Christian women, and *The Other Side*, a national Christian magazine that regularly explores peace and justice issues. Each reporter was given a 13 page summary of the 'misleading and inflammatory' remarks about lesbian and gay Americans' made in the last three years by Mr. Dobson, his staff, his radio guests, or found in Focus on the Family print or media materials.

Reporters also received a summary of speeches recorded at the secret May 15-17, 1994, Glen Eyrie conference called by leaders of 40 different anti-gay organizations to plot their strategy for the elimination of gay rights before 1996. The conference key note address was given by John Eldridge, a Focus vice-president, who said, "...the gay agenda has all the elements of that which is truly evil. It is deceptive at every turn. It is destroying the souls and lives of those who embrace it." In his opening greeting, Mr. Eldridge said "Dr. Dobson and those of us at Focus on the Family...see this issue as one of the key issues of our time. So much hinges on what happens with the full agenda of the militant gay movement."

At 2:00 P.M. with MCC's pastor, Nori Rost, and Ground Zero's President, Bobby Mone, Mel carried a bouquet of flowers up the hill above the Fast site to the personal offices of James Dobson, founder and president of Focus on the Family. With the flowers went a handwritten note from Dr. White inviting Dr. Dobson and/or his representatives to meet with participants in the fast to discuss their charges at "any time and any place."

During the first day, at least fifty different people, dropped by the fast site to offer their encouragement. Several brought flowers or bottles of Gatorade with cards thanking Mel and the sponsors for their courage. Channel 11's evening news at 5 and 10 PM both opened with Mel White's interview and Focus' official reply. Both praise and curses were shouted from passing cars during the fast's long and eventful first day. A security officer spent the night at the fast site as more and more curious people were drawn to the scene.

Day two of the fast, Tuesday, July 12, began at 5:30 AM for Dr. White on a walk around the massive Focus on the Family Campus. When asked about the walk, Dr. White replied, "Gandhi once said about fasting, 'If you keep your spirit fed, your body won't feel the hunger.' I watched the sunrise over Focus asking God's spirit to guide us in this fast. We are here to build bridges of understanding. And it won't be easy."

At the fast site, the day began with interviews by a reporter from the *Denver Post* and a camera crew from Channel 5, a second Colorado Springs television station. The morning edition of the Gazette Telegraph carried an 11 by 6 inch photo of Dr. White at the fast site with the headquarters' of Focus on the Family looming in the background. The picture's caption read, "Hungry for Understanding," and the headline over the reporter's interview with Dr. White read, "Gay cleric fasts for tolerance." The article concluded with the official response by Paul Hetrick, a Focus Vice President, who said, "...blaming Dobson for homosexuals' problems is bogus. The problems are a byproduct of the lifestyle." After claiming that White's appearance in Colorado Springs may be nothing more than "a stunt to promote his book, *Stranger at the Gate: To Be Gay and Christian in America*, " Mr. Hetrick went on to claim that Mel White was "indicting Dr. Dobson for complicity to murder." Mel White replied, "Mr. Hetrick said it. I didn't."

Because of the TV and newspaper stories generated by Day One of the fast, the number of people coming to the fast site to praise or to curse Dr. White doubled. Visitors were encouraged to sign the Fast for Understanding banner. The brief messages they left tell a deeply moving story of the suffering of gays and lesbians in Colorado Springs, especially after Colorado's Amendment 2 campaign divided this city into warring camps. A conservative pastor who still thinks homosexuality "is a sin," dropped by with his daughter "to hear the other side of the story." Colin Cook, a controversial "former homosexual" and now a leader in the "ex-gay" reparative therapy movement, and Kevin Tebedo, head of the Colorado for Family Values, the group that spearheaded the campaign to eliminate gay rights in Colorado, came by to confront Dr. White. A Catholic priest who ministers to local men with AIDS, dropped by the fast site to offer encouragement and communion to the fasters. At least 100 strangers came by to give support. Because a newspaper story mentioned that Dr. White was limiting his fast to water and Gatorade, dozens of thoughtful Coloradans brought bottles of the stuff.

Early in the afternoon, Dr. H.B.London, a Focus Vice-President, called Dr. White at the fast site by cellular phone to invite him and three others to meet with three Focus Vice-Presidents on the following morning. After the call, Mel repeated the words that had begun this day. "We're here to build bridges of understanding. And it won't be easy," he said again. "It may not even be possible. But we have to try."

DAY THREE

Wednesday, July 13, 1994

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO. Mel White and his life-partner, Gary Nixon, spent a restless night at their fast site in front of the world headquarters' of James Dobson's Focus on the Family ministries. The security guard had to jump from his car to warn away one determined late night caller and several times, well after midnight, people honked their horns, spun their wheels, or yelled "faggot" as they sped away.

At exactly 9:00 AM, Dr. White, Robert Mone and Franklin Whitworth from Ground Zero, Buzz Frum, from P-FLAG (Parents, Friends and Families of Lesbians and Gays), and the Reverend Rost from the Colorado Springs Metropolitan Community Church walked into the world headquarters of Focus on the Family. They were greeted by Vice President, H.B. London, and given a one hour tour of the 225,000 square foot headquarters and the 175,000 square foot distribution center. According to their guide, Focus receives 10,000 letters and 3,500 phone calls daily and mails out approximately 5 million letters and parcels of materials every year. During the tour, Dr. London told Dr. White that several of his facts about Focus were wrong. For example, the Focus annual budget was $97 million not $150 million as Mel had claimed. Dr. White apologized for any errors in the numbers in his press release and promised to change them immediately.

From 10:00 AM to 11:00 AM, Mel White and his associates met with four Focus leaders. "The spirit of our meeting was excellent," Dr. White explained later. "Although we didn't come to any kind of agreement during this opening round of talks, both sides expressed themselves honestly and openly." After their meeting with Focus leaders, Mr. Buzz Frum, the PFLAG parent explained why he was in solidarity with Dr. White's fast.

"I am an evangelical Christian, too," he said, "and a long, time supporter of Focus on the Family. But when God blessed our heterosexual home with a lesbian daughter and a gay son, we began to realize that Jim Dobson and his colleagues were not right about everything. We love and respect our homosexual children as God loves and respects them. And though we still don't understand everything about sexual orientation, we can see God's spirit working in our gay children's lives. We are so saddened and alarmed by the cloud of misinformation that Focus, Colorado for Family Values, and other organizations are distributing about lesbian and gay people. During the Amendment 2 campaign," he added, "our son's life was threatened. The misinformation flowing out of Focus leads directly to intolerance and discrimination against our own children and I was glad to have an opportunity to warn Focus of the great harm they are doing to my family and across the nation to other families with gay or lesbian children."

During the afternoon, dozens of people dropped by the fast site to encourage Dr. White and the people who were fasting with him. Samuel Behrens, a young, gay lawyer, came from California representing Christian Gays and Lesbians for Justice, a group of Christian activists from the Western Region of Evangelicals Concerned. Duane Johnson, the MCC pastor in Richmond, Virginia, was sent by his congregation to join in the fast. "I am here," he explained,

us both. But what can we do before your militant fundamentalist agenda leads to terrible consequences for us and for this nation?"

After delivering the completed letter to Focus on the Family offices, Mel did another hour-long talk show appearance, this time on a Denver radio station that covers the entire state of Colorado. The switchboard was swamped with callers supporting the fast, encouraging Dr. White in his campaign against the radical right. Dozens of Coloradans visited the fast site that day bringing flowers and more Gatorade. More than 80 E-mail messages of encouragement were received from the U.S., Canada, and as far away as Turin, Italy. The Reverend, Elder Troy Perry, founder of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches called the Fast site to express his support for Mel, for Nori Rost, the MCC pastor in Colorado Springs, and all the others who were fasting.

"We are in solidarity with you, brother," Troy shouted over the noisy static. "And to prove it, we are holding a service Saturday in support of your Fast for Understanding at Lou Sheldon's Traditional Values Coalition headquarters in Santa Anna, California." Mel White was visibly moved by the call. "Besides founding our UFMCC movement," he explained, "for 25 years Troy Perry has been a leading activist against intolerance of every kind. Before Stonewall, he chained himself to a public building in Los Angeles and fasted to protest the imprisonment of an innocent gay man. I am here in Colorado Springs in large part because of his example."

One of the most memorable Fast site visitors that day was a Jewish family from Colorado Springs. "We have called all our friends to make posters and come to your Love Makes a Family rally tomorrow," the mother replied. Then, after sharing their mutual concerns, she added quietly, "We are here to support you because we remember that the last time they took you first as well. It must not happen again." That courageous Jewish family left the Fast team with tears in their eyes and sad memories of what can happen to a nation when rhetoric leads to intolerance and intolerance leads to holocaust.

DAYS SIX AND SEVEN

Saturday, July 16 and Sunday, July 17 1994

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO. At sunrise, Saturday morning, city employees began to erect a bright orange, net fence to protect Mel White's Fast for Understanding site in front of James Dobson's Focus on the Family world headquarters. For three hours the previous afternoon, on a local Limbaugh-like talk show, representatives from Focus and Colorado for Family Values had been protesting Dr. White's fast, questioning White's motives, and denying his charges that both organizations were misleading the public with their false and inflammatory rhetoric against gay and lesbian Americans. More threats and various calls to march on the site "to take care of those creeps" were made by angry listeners. Early Saturday morning, all roads leading to Mr. Dobson's multi-million dollar facility were blocked. Just one lane of traffic was left open for Coloradans in solidarity with Dr. White's fast who would be arriving for the 12:00 noon Pro-Family Rally. Policemen wearing bullet proof vests were parked in place or patrolling the grounds by foot, on horseback, and in at least a dozen squad cars.

"I didn't think anybody would come," Dr. White confessed as he sat in the Ground Zero RV watching dozen of Coloradans make their way through the police barricades and up the hill to the fast site just yards from the Focus "Welcome Center." He went on to explain that just the night before, only 150 people showed up for the Pride Film Festival's screening of "Living Proof," a prize-winning documentary on courageous and loving people living with AIDS. "More than 600 people had purchased advance tickets," White continued, "but because of the wild charges and angry threats cluttering the airwaves, people called Ground Zero's office confessing they were afraid to attend. And that was in a public auditorium in downtown Colorado Springs," White added, "I was expecting only a handful of folk to attend the Pro-Family rally here at Focus."

But by noon, this reporter counted almost 200 Coloradans, straight and gay together, walking up the grassy hillside towards the fast site. They came alone and in family units, adults and children, hand-in-hand, carrying flowers or balloons to Focus on the Family as a sign of their peaceful approach to building understanding. They wore brightly colored T-shirts or waved hand-made signs with their messages of reconciliation: "We are family, too," "Straight but not narrow," "I love my gay son...my lesbian daughter," "It happens in the best of families," "Better gay than grumpy," "Jesus loves us, this we know!"

The local sponsors of Mel's fast, including Ground Zero, P-FLAG (Parents, Family, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), La Guia (the Hispanic Caucus), and the Pike's Peak Metropolitan Community Church were surprised and pleased when several TV camera crews arrived to video tape their Pro-Family rally. Lyn Boudreaux, Betty Lynn Mahaffey and friends sang and played guitars. Romanovsky and Phillips, gay life-partners whose best-selling duet albums have led to sold-out live performances across the nation, called to dedicate their song, "Love is all it takes," to Mel White and his Fast for Understanding. The song was played before Dr. White spoke. Hosted by Bobby Mone, other speakers included Franklin Whitworth of Ground Zero, Altresa Williams of the Colorado Springs Minority Council, Cahuilla Margaret Red Elk of the American Indian Movement, Gerda Fletcher, a P-FLAG mom, Joe Zuniga, America's "Soldier of the Year" who was discharged for being gay, and Michael Bussee, a founder of Exodus, the movement that would "cure gays" which he now rejects as "a well-meaning but terrible deceit."

Michael Bussee's life-partner, Ted Swink, sat in his wheelchair near the Pro-Family rally platform. Once a professional singer, now thin, pale, and weak from his courageous battle with AIDS, Ted volunteered to sing, "The Rose." Ted's Mom and Dad, B.J. and Jim, stood nearby to encourage and support their son. As Ted struggled up from his wheelchair, walked to the mike, and sang beautifully, there were smiles, tears, and hugs all around. When the rally ended, each person in the crowd placed a carnation into the shape of a triangle of pink flowers that would be given to Mr. Dobson and his staff.

Later, with his life-partner, Gary Nixon, at his side, Mel White met with reporters to explain the purpose of this Pro-Family rally. "James Dobson, and his allies on the radical right, have decided that the only *real* families in America are those with a mother, a father, and 2.5 children. But he is wrong. Today, we celebrate every family configuration where people live together in love and commitment: traditional families with a mom and dad in place, single parents struggling to bring nurture to their children, lesbian and gay couples with or without kids to raise, and extended families who have reached out to care for others who are lonely and afraid." Looking at the crowd of lesbians and gays, many of them with children, White added, "Whatever Mr. Dobson says, we are family, too. His job is not to caricature and condemn our families but to use at least a small percentage of his $97 million budget to bring hope and healing to our families, too."

On Saturday night, several hundred people gathered to view the prize-winning film "One Nation Under God," a recent Public Broadcasting special documenting the failures of the "ex-gay" movement and illustrating the primitive and ineffectual methods used by those who would "cure" homosexual orientation. Michael Bussee, who is featured in the film, fielded questions with Dr. Mel White, a film's sponsor, before Jose Zuniga joined them as the special guests of a community reception in their honor.

Kevin Tebedo, one of the primary instigators of the anti-gay, Amendment 2 initiative in Colorado (now declared unconstitutional) had called for his followers to protest the screening. At his earlier confrontation with Dr. White, Tebedo bragged without blinking that God had "told him" to launch this crusade against gay and lesbian Americans. On his way from the fast site, Tebedo asked this question of Samuel Behrens, the lawyer from Christian Gays and Lesbians for Justice: "Where are you going to go," he threatened, "when we win?" Tebedo showed up at the screening alone, fidgeted his way through half of the film, and then crept away in the darkness.

On Sunday morning, the seventh day of the Fast for Understanding, Colorado Springs only daily paper, the *Gazette Telegraph*, included a full page reproduction of Dr. Dobson's letter attacking Dr. Mel White's integrity and attempting to refute White's charge that Dobson's anti-gay rhetoric "leads to suffering and death." As White joined thousands of lesbians and gays gathering for the Pride Fest in Acacia Park, reporters asked him to respond. "Nobody would spend all that money to take out a full page ad against us if we hadn't hit a sensitive nerve," White replied. "Actually, his full page letter is so full of misleading and inflammatory rhetoric against lesbian and gay people that it proves my point. I just wish we had one percent of his $97 million dollar, tax-free budget to answer him with our side of the story."

At 1:00 PM, hundreds of marchers, musical groups, at least a dozen floats and performers followed Joe Zuniga, the 1994 Grand Marshall, in Colorado Spring's annual Pride Parade. Just behind Mr. Zuniga's flower-decked convertible, Mel White and Gary Nixon walked in front of the RV that had been their home for the seven day fast. Two tall native Americans representing the American Indian Movement marched alongside as security for the parade's special guests. The Ground Zero RV had been transformed into a "Wall of Shame," covered with specific examples of the anti-gay rhetoric of Dobson, his staff, and other leaders of the radical right.

Colorado Springs Police estimated that nearly 5,000 people marched in the parade and attended the Pride Rally that followed. After his speech, Mel White asked the crowd who had gathered on behalf of gay rights, if they would donate money to Ground Zero to buy a full page ad to answer Dr. Dobson's anti-gay rhetoric. The crowd cheered and volunteers from Ground Zero passed among the celebrants collecting dollars and spare change. In just thirty minutes, $3,000 was collected to pay for the full page response.

"In an unexpectedly huge show of support for gay and lesbian rights," the Denver Post reported, "more than 2,000 people marched peacefully from Colorado College into Acacia Park. The activists came from throughout the Rock Mountain region to support the week-long fast of the Rev. Mel White, Dean of the Cathedral of Hope in Dallas, Texas. White had consumed nothing but water and Gatorade since July 10, but he was to end his fast last night by taking holy communion at the Pike's Peak M.C.C."

"White," the Denver Post reporter continued, "spent the past week in a long-distance war of words with James Dobson, founder and president of Focus on the Family." The Post quoted Dobson's claim that all his comments about homosexuals "were respectful, caring and compassionate...but I disagree strongly with many of the goals of this movement and I'm entitled to express those perspectives in the public arena. " In response, the Post quoted these words from White's reply: "If there are homosexuals who do evil, remember there are heterosexuals who do evil as well. we don't talk about the 'militant heterosexual agenda' just because there are heterosexuals who produce pornography, molest children, carry diseases and participate in destructive and dehumanizing sexual acts. Don't blame millions of innocent gays and lesbians for the evil done by a few."

(cont.. on Pg. 5, Daily Fast)

"because I understand the ignorance and suffering these people help create. My church in Richmond is half way between the headquarters cities of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. Like James Dobson, these men may be sincere," he said, "but they are sincerely wrong about lesbian and gay people. And their misinformation must be confronted and condemned by all of us."

At 5:00 PM, Dr. White received a five page press release from Focus on the Family titled "Speaking of Disinformation: A Response to Mel White's Criticism of Focus on the Family." After correcting several of Dr. White's statistics on the financial and political clout of the Focus' worldwide ministries, the unknown author of this unsigned 'Social Research Brief' listed 8 "false assertions" made by Dr. White.
"In denying just eight of my many assertions," Dr. White replied, "and in defending their tired old case against homosexuality, Focus has accomplished for me exactly what I came to do. Behind the loving Focus on the Family image is a growing obsession to caricature and condemn gay people. Their press release is so replete with misleading and inflammatory rhetoric against lesbians and gays that I'm going to quit using my 13 page summary of their words against us and just use their own news release to prove my point. Any thoughtful American who reads through their lurid and totally inaccurate description of the "gay lifestyle" or the imaginary "gay agenda" will realize how desperate Focus is to keep alive their demeaning and dehumanizing caricature of homosexuals. I can't understand why they insist on misusing a handful of Biblical texts and the discredited research of a handful of their 'authority' figures to condemn us. It is so unlike anything Jesus would say or do."

By 8:00 PM more than 100 people gathered at the fast site for a candlelight vigil to support the fast. Heterosexual and gay parents brought their children. Gay and lesbians couples stood hand in hand. Local pastors and members of gay-affirming congregations joined in the vigil. More than a dozen individual gay or lesbian Christians in the crowd told this reporter that this vigil was their first step out of the closet into the front lines in this war against them. After a moving program of special music and speeches, the crowd lit their candles, walked to the entrance of Focus on the Family's world headquarters, and stood peacefully at the police barricades singing, "We shall overcome" and "Jesus loves me, this I know."

DAYS FOUR AND FIVE

Thursday, July 14 and Friday 15, 1994

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO. Mel White began this fourth day of his Fast for Understanding as the guest of a popular morning talk show. He responded to callers by cellular phone from the Ground Zero RV parked in front of James Dobson's Focus on the Family world headquarters. The flood of calls praising and cursing Dr. White's presence in Colorado Springs made it clear that the whole town was talking about this UFMCC clergyman's charges against Focus, one of the city's largest industries, and the other approximately 60 organizations from the radical religious right headquartered here.

"Jim Dobson is not an evil man," White said quietly. "Focus on the Family is not an evil organization. In their misunderstanding of gay and lesbian people they are victims of other victims of superstition and prejudice that have been passed down to them over the ages. It took me more than 30 years to understand and accept myself," he added. "Now, I have to give Mr. Dobson and the others the time they need to know and understand me. But, in the meantime, whether his motives are good or bad, we cannot remain silent in the face of Dobson's anti-gay rhetoric and his national anti-gay political campaign. His words and actions lead directly to the suffering and death of innocent and loving gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgendered Americans."

Just after the noon luncheon of more Lemon-Lime Gatorade on ice, Focus Vice-President H.B.London appeared at the fast site to hand-deliver a 5 page letter to White from James Dobson (who was writing from France). The letter had already been released to the nation's media. After accusing White of "distorting the truth," Dobson wrote, "It is clear from your manipulations of the press (which has collaborated willingly) that your purpose in this campaign is to capitalize on the visibility of Focus on the Family to publicize your book and promote yourself. What we have here is an elaborate publicity campaign wrapped in the cloak of human rights...Admittedly, the distortions in your letter and in recent pronouncements go beyond self-promotion. You have twisted the truth, deliberately I assume, with regard to my writings and the subject of my radio broadcasts."

Dr. Dobson went on to claim that in his 4,000 radio broadcasts over 17 years, "only a handful have been devoted to the subject of homosexuality, and on all occasions, the comments made were respectful and caring, and compassionate...Nor have there been instances of hatred in my writings. I believe you know that is true, but you've claimed otherwise to generate the desired publicity..."

Dobson took the next four pages to say why he was concerned about gay activists and their campaign "to utilize the public schools to undermine heterosexual marriage and the institution of the family. In some cases," he adds, "pro-gay literature and program like Project 10 have been used for purposes of homosexual recruitment." After quoting in lurid detail a local conservative columnist's attempt to "expose" the sex education program with inner-city youth by the New York's Gay Men's Health Crisis, Dobson continues. "Exposure of children to this kind of outrageous and immoral material MUST be stopped, Mel. Those who would do such things should never again have access to young minds...I will fight this campaign as long as I have breath within my body."

["At this point, while reading the letter to friends and supporters gathered at the Fast site, Dr. White groaned and looked angry. "I get so tired of these ridiculous charges against Project 10 and the other courageous folk who risk everything to provide real services to those in need. While focus talks about molested children, Ground Zero, the tiny gay-rights organization in Colorado Springs, raised $30,000 for molested children being treated in Denver's Children Hospital. I can't help but wonder," White asked, "what actual good does Focus do with $97 million a year or is it all talk?"]
Dobson's letter to White continues. After raging against "the attempt by gay activists to capture the hearts and minds of children," Dobson claims, "Homosexual activists enjoy such incredible support in the media and within the entertainment industry that they have become heady with power. Any visible person who has the temerity to disagree with the party line is subjected to lies, intimidation and ridicule. It appears," he accuses Mel White, "that your foray into Colorado Springs is an expression of that political pressure."

To Dr. White's charge that Dobson's current direct-mail, anti-gay, fundraising campaign "has gone far beyond malpractice..." Dr. Dobson replies, "I rarely mention money in my letters or on the air. Hard sell fund raising does not occur within this ministry and certainly, the request for money has never been linked to fear tactics of any kind." Dr. Dobson ends the letter by accusing Dr. White of "profound hypocrisy," insisting that he "fight fair," and demanding that he "document his charges..."

At 3:00 PM, that same day, Dr. Dobson's letter was read on the air by a local "Rush Limbaugh type" talk show host. Immediately, listeners called in to condemn Dr. White. "Somebody ought to go up there and shoot him," a caller exclaimed. Others agreed. By early evening, there had been enough on-the-air death threats that the sponsors of Dr. White's fast moved him and his life-partner, Gary Nixon, out of the RV and into a nearby motel for the night. Franklin Whitworth at Ground Zero announced a press conference to reply to Dr. Dobson's letter for Noon the next day.

On Fast Day 5, Mel rose at 4:00 AM to write his letter responding to Dr. Dobson's charges. "I've never questioned your sincerity," he began. "I'm sorry you have questioned mine...This Fast for Understanding is not about self-aggrandizement nor selling books. It is far too dangerous and costly for that...For years we have monitored your anti-gay rhetoric," White explained. "In the 13 page case I made against you, every one of my examples is taken directly from your words or the words of your broadcast guests, from Focus on the Family letters, books, audio tapes, video tapes, or direct-mail, fund-raising appeals...I stand by my charges that [your] anti-gay rhetoric leads directly to discrimination, suffering and death for gay and lesbian people."

To the claims of Dobson and his staff that they "love homosexuals" and have "never advocated violence against them," White replied, "Do you think that by saying you 'love us' just before repeating your litany of false charges against us, that you can declare yourself innocent of the hatred and violence that your anti-gay rhetoric sets in motion?
And if you think you can ease the suffering that you help cause by directing your false charges at some imaginary "militant homosexual activist," you are wrong. Your listeners hear your charges and think that all homosexuals have "an agenda that threatens American family values," that we all "recruit and molest children," that we all participate in ugly and dehumanizing sexual practices," that we all are "carriers of dread diseases," etc. etc. etc.

"It isn't enough for you to caricature and condemn us falsely," Dr. White continued. "Now you and your staff have joined with your powerful colleagues from the Christian Coalition, American Family Association, Traditional values Coalition...and dozens of other national and local radical right organizations to put your anti-gay rhetoric into political action." Dr. White went on to remind Dr. Dobson of his staff's primary role in the secret, May 15-17, 1994, Glen Eyrie conference where leaders from 40 organizations from the radical right gathered. According to Ground Zero's president, Bobby Mone, who has complete transcripts from the meetings, "they came to Colorado Springs to plot their strategy to end all homosexual rights in America by 1996 and to effectively eliminate homosexuality from the national scene."

White's letter to Dobson continues. "I believe in your first Amendment right to say what you believe," he writes to Dobson, "but your non-profit status clearly prohibits this kind of political action. And your commitment to Jesus and to the Constitution of this nation should prohibit your participation in any national strategy to eliminate the rights of others, even the rights of those with whom you disagree...You have stopped talking about Jesus and you've started a political campaign to superimpose your fundamentalist agenda over the rights of every American who disagrees. Your actions are unChristian and unAmerican. Worse, in your obsession to eliminate abortion and homosexuality (for just two examples) you have become a primary voice for intolerance in the land."

After describing the death threats that he received directly after Dr. Dobson's letter was read on the radio, White continued. "I know you get death threats, too. But your death threats don't come because you've talked about Jesus, or preached the Gospel, or given wise counsel to your listeners. Your death threats come because of your covert (and sometimes overt) call for intolerance against this imaginary "militant homosexual agenda." My death threats come because I call for tolerance and love and understanding for my gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgendered brothers and sisters. We disagree about homosexuality, Jim. It's OK to disagree. That right is guaranteed

(Cont. next page)

Dr. Dobson's Letter to Rev. White

Dear Mel:

As you must know by now, my wife and I are on the European trip at this time, having flown yesterday from Paris to London. Your letter caught up with us a few days ago, but this is the first opportunity I've had to respond. Obviously, I won't be able to meet with you during your visit to Colorado Springs and to the campus of Focus on the Family.

Under other circumstances, I would have been happy to sit down with you and talk about our differing perspectives. What makes such an interchange unlikely in the immediate future is the striking degree of dishonesty in your public comments about me and the real purposes of your campaign. Let me elaborate.

First, you had distorted the truth with regard to our relationship. I hardly know you, and more importantly, you don't know me at all. Yet just before I left on this trip, I received a press release from your promoters which read, "Mel White -- has a special message to deliver to Dr Dobson, who was among those for whom he wrote speeches and with whom he counseled."

What an irresponsible misrepresentation of facts, Mel. No one has ever written a speech for me. Not once in a lifetime. Nor have I used ghost writers to author my books. You also know that I never provided any counseling for you or your family. These are posturing statements that I challenge you to document or correct in the press. I have never even had so much as a cup of coffee with you. The most lengthy conversation between us occurred in the lobby of the Amway Grand Hotel, January, 1993, when we shook hands and talked for about two minutes. That is the extent of our "working relationship." How can we now discuss our differences in an atmosphere of mutual respect when you have constructed a fraudulent basis for such a conversation?

Second, the way you handled your most recent letter to me also reveals your propagandistic motives. It was marked, "Personal, Confidential and Private." I assumed from that designation that you intended the letter to be personal, confidential and private. I treated it that way and would have responded in kind. The next day I heard that you had released the letter to the press and it was quoted in Denver and in the Springs. Apparently, it was not written to me but rather to your friends in the media.

The suspicion was validated when you showed up in our lobby on Monday with a bouquet of flowers for me. Not surprisingly, you brought a photographer with you. It is clear from these and other manipulations of the press (which has collaborated willingly) that your purpose in this campaign is to capitalize on the visibility of Focus on the Family to publicize your book and promote yourself. What we have here is an elaborate publicity campaign wrapped in the cloak of human rights.

Admittedly, the distortions in your letter and in recent pronouncements go beyond self-promotion. You have twisted the truth, deliberately I assume, with regard to my writings and the subjects of my radio broadcasts. I've aired about 4,000 programs during my 17 years on the air. Of that number, only a handful have been devoted to the subject of homosexuality, and on all occasions, the comments made were respectful, caring, and compassionate. There was not a word of disrespect aimed at individuals who are homosexual or lesbian. (Tapes are available for any members of the press who would like to validate this point.) Nor have there been instances of hatred in my writings. I believe you know that is true, but you've claimed otherwise to generate the desired publicity.

In the numerous interviews you've given this past year, you have made many wild statements about us but never quoted a word that I've said or written. You've never documented any of your assertions about our supposed extremism or bigotry. So I'm asking you now in this letter, which will also be released to the press, to come forward with evidence. I invite you to quote chapter and verse. Cite the dates. Provide the basis for your incendiary charges against me and Focus on the Family. Take a month or two to check the record. You'll find not a word that dehumanizes any individuals or any classification of people.

I have opposed the agenda of homosexual and lesbian activists, and have aired perhaps fifteen broadcasts on that concern over the years. I disagree strongly with many of the goals of this movement, and I'm entitled to express those perspectives in the public arena. I'm especially concerned about the efforts by gay activists to utilize the public schools to undermine heterosexual marriage and the institution of the family. In some cases, pro-gay literature and programs like Project 10 have been used for purposes of homosexual recruitment.

Let me quote excerpts from a recent column written by Mona Charen, Entitled, "In New York a lurid curriculum for mere 12 year olds." The article was published in dozens of newspapers, including the *Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph*. Here are excerpts from that column:

If your child's high school is handing out condoms, cheer up. Things could worse. It could be sponsoring indoctrination by the Gay Men's Health Crisis, as New York has done.

The New York City Department of Education, unchastened by the ouster of former schools superintendent, Joseph Fernandez, over the Rainbow Curriculum, has sponsored a so-called "peer-educators" conference organized by the Gay men's Health Crisis. In the guise of presenting health information, GMHC used the occasion to engage in raw (in all senses of the work) homosexual propaganda aimed at teen-agers.

"...The circulars handed out to junior high and high school students include nude pictures of a woman with her legs spread to an approaching clenched fist (swathed in latex). Lesbian "fisting," the pamphlet explains, can be enjoyed in the participants are suitably armored with gloves. In fact, "fisting" is a painful and hazardous practice which has resulted in many injuries and one known death.

There are instruction in the proper methods for trying "golden showers" (sexual activity with urine, enemas (I kid you not) scalpels and razors. The section entitled "welts and blisters" advises the kids to "wear latex gloves and be sure to clean your canes, crops, whips, etc. See section on sex toys."

Young men and particularly young black men, are told that anal intercourse is "safe" if done with a condom. I won't in deference to the standard of family newspapers, reproduce the language used.

The conference, "Youth Teaching Your about HIV/AIDS," was aimed at kids ages 12 - 24 and was held at New York University Medical Center on Feb. 12. The Board of Education cooperated by posting notices for the conference in high schools throughout the city, by making its office space, computers, fax machines and telephones available to the organizers, and by listing its own "High School HIV/AIDS Resource Center" as the conference mailing address.

..Clorox and soap, condoms and dental dams, fists and knives, whips and chains, this is the stuff the New York Board of Education presents to 12-year-olds. This is what masquerades as fighting AIDS."

Exposure of children to this kind of outrageous and immoral material MUST be stopped, Mel. Those who would do such things should never again have access to young minds. Indeed, as a father, you should be the first to condemn the use of kids for this kind of political purpose. You might consider driving your motor home to New York City and parking it for a week outside the Board of Education. Unfortunately, I've never heard you or any other gay activist take a stand against such abuse. We are not talking about civil rights, here. We are dealing with incredibly offensive efforts to manipulate the most vulnerable and uninformed among us. I will fight this campaign as long as I have breath within my body.

I am hardly alone in that posture. Indeed, Focus on the Family is in the mainstream in all of its perspectives. The vast majority of parents and citizens are also opposed to the attempt by gay activists to capture the hearts and minds of children. That's why Colorado residents rose in masse a few months ago to oppose the PTA's support of providing homosexual propaganda to school-aged children. Taking such a position does not represent hatred of gays and lesbians. It is a reflection of deep convictions about what is good for children, good for families, and good for the nation.

Nevertheless, other gay activists have taken the position that anyone who disagrees with their radical vision of the world is a bigot and a hate-monger. That is demagogic, Mel. Homosexual activists enjoy such incredible support in the media and within the entertainment industry that they have become heady with power. Any visible person who has the temerity to disagree with the party line is subjected to lies, intimidation and ridicule. It appears to us that your foray into Colorado Springs is an expression of that political presseure.

There is finally, another gross misrepresentation in your letter. You wrote, "(your) current direct-mail fundraising campaign (is) using anti-gay/lesbian rhetoric to create fear and raise money (and) has gone far beyond malpractice." I'm sure you know that no such campaign is in progress, nor has anything like that ever occurred here. I rarely mention money in my letters or on the air. Hard sell fund raising does not occur within this ministry, and certainly, the request for money has never been linked to fear tactics of any kind. You've also implied that I raise huge quantities of money for personal gain, although I'm sure you know I've never taken a salary from this ministry in its 17 years history. I even reimburse Focus for what it spends on health insurance for my family. So again, I ask you to correct the public record. Either document the existence of a fund-raising "campaign" and alleged financial chicanery, or apologize to the press and to us for fabricating the story.

Given these many manipulations and misrepresentations of the facts, Mel, it is interesting that you have come to Focus on the Family to speak for moral principles, right and wrong. There's profound hypocrisy there somewhere.

Let me summarize: I've never tried to hurt you or anyone else. In fact, I have not uttered a work about you publicly, even though you've been attacking me unjustly for almost a year. You appear to be a very angry man who is looking for someone to blame for the fain in your life, and I'm a convenient scapegoat. So be it. I just ask that you fight fair. When you make an accusation of me, please be man enough to document it with quotations and circumstances. And especially I ask that you not tell the world that we are close friends or that we have worked together in the past. You know that is a baseless claim.

Will I meet with you in the future? Yes, if you will come privately for purposes of honest dialogue. But will I participate in your book promotion tour and the currently organized propaganda campaign? Sorry. I'm not interested.

Despite the candor of this reply to your charges, Mel, I extend my best regards to you. While we disagree strongly on some very critical issues, I do not intend any ill will or malice to you. If you know me better, you'd understand that I really mean that.

Sincerely, James C. Dobson, Ph.D.

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY

CATHEDRAL OF HOPE
Metropolitan Community Church

Rev. White Responds to Dr. Dobson

Dear Jim,

Thank you for your letter of July 14, 1994. I am sorry for the inconvenience and discomfort all this has caused you. I have never questioned your sincerity. I'm sorry you have questioned mine. By now, you know that a Ground Zero volunteer thought you had been one of my writing clients. Immediately, when he discovered his error, Ground Zero explained and retracted his release. You must know as well that this fast for understanding is not about self-aggrandizement nor selling books. It is far too dangerous and costly for that. And I hope you know, too, that I want nothing but the best for you and for your Focus on the Family ministry, but in your anti-gay words and political actions you are causing suffering for my brothers and sisters and there is no way I can remain silent in light of that suffering.

I believe you are sincere in raising up "an army of committed soldiers" to represent "righteousness and family integrity" in your "moral equivalent to war." But in that March 1993 prayer and fund-raising letter's call to wage war, you use the words "homosexual," "homosexuality," "gay" or "lesbian" 22 times to illustrate your "alarming erosion of morality in the culture."

For years we have monitored your anti-gay rhetoric. In the 13 page case I made against you, every one of my examples is taken directly from your words or the words of your broadcasts guests, from Focus on the Family letters, books, audio tapes, video tapes, or direct-mail, fund-raising appeals. [Your regular letters to Focus' friends and supporters may not be "hard-sell fund-raising," but when I sit here in the shadow of your tax-free, multi-million dollar headquarters in Colorado Springs with 1,300 employees and a $97 million annual budget, we can be sure that your fund raising skills, if not "hard sell," are truly effective.] I stand by my charge that the anti-gay rhetoric in your broadcasts and print/media materials lead directly to discrimination, suffering and death for gay and lesbian people.

"But I love homosexuals," you are probably thinking. "And," you add quickly, "I have never advocated violence against them." Of course, but do you actually believe that by saying you "love us," just before repeating your litany of false charges against us, that you can declare yourself innocent of the hatred and violence that your anti-gay rhetoric sets in motion?

And if you think you can ease the suffering that you help cause by directing your false charges at some imaginary "militant homosexual activist" you are wrong. Your listeners hear your charges and think that all homosexuals have "an agenda that threatens American family values," that we all "recruit and molest children," that we all participate in ugly and dehumanizing sexual practices," that we all are "carriers of dread diseases," etc. etc. etc.

It isn't enough for you to caricature and condemn us falsely. Now you and your staff have joined with your powerful colleagues from the Christian Coalition, American Family Association, Eagle Forum, Concerned Women for America, Traditional Values Coalition, and dozens of other national and local radical right organizations, to put your anti-gay rhetoric into political action. I have the transcripts of the secret anti-gay meeting on May 15-17 at the Navigator's Glen Eyrie Center. That gathering of at least 35 different anti-gay organizations, had one primary political goal: to eliminate gay and lesbian rights in this country forever.

I have on tape your words of greeting to that political gathering by John Eldredge the first, keynote speaker. "The gay agenda," he claimed quite falsely , "has all the elements of that which is truly evil. It is deceptive at every turn...It deceives those who are drawn into it, who embrace. It presents an extraordinarily deceptive face to the public at large."

John was one of the four delegates to that conference from Focus on the Family. (In fact, Focus had more delegates to this savagely anti-gay gathering than came from the host organization, Colorado For Family Values.) Mr. Eldredge made his goals for gays and lesbians completely clear: "...to roll back the militant gay agenda wherever it manifests itself...whether in domestic partnership ordinances...school curriculum issues...pursuit of minority status..marriage and adoption privileges, so on and so forth."

The goals of that elaborate, expensive, precinct by precinct, city by city, state by state campaign would eliminate the rights of all gay and lesbian Americans. And your men from Focus on the Family helped put that patently political plan into place. I believe in your first amendment rights to say what you believe. But your non-profit status clearly prohibits this kind of political action. And your commitment to Jesus and to the Constitution of this nation should prohibit your participation in any national strategy to eliminate the rights of others, even the rights of those with whom you disagree.

Jim, can't you see what has happened to you and to my old friends and clients on the religious right? You have stopped talking about Jesus and you've started a political campaign to superimpose your fundamentalist agenda over the rights of every American who disagrees. Your actions are unChristian and unAmerican. Worse, inadvertently, in your obsession to eliminate abortion and homosexuality (for just two examples) you have become a primary voice for intolerance in the land.

Your friends on the radical religious right will applaud you. To them, intolerance has become a positive word. "I want you to just let a wave of intolerance wash over you," says Randall Terry, your friend from Operation Rescue. "I want you to let a wave of hatred wash over you. Yes, hate is good...Our goal is a Christian nation. We have a biblical duty, we are called by God, to conquer this country. We don't want equal time. We don't want pluralism." (The News-Sentinel, Fort Wayne, Ind, August 16, 1993)

You didn't say those words, Jim. You may not even believe them. But how far will you go to exert your view of Christian morality over this nation? I am truly frightened by the prospect of where this all might end. I am a gay, Christian man. At the heart of your agenda is the desire to "eliminate homosexuality" (the phrase your associate Larry Bertoff used yesterday on a TV debate with me.) How else can you "eliminate homosexuality" if you don't eliminate the homosexuals who refuse to submit to your primitive, ineffectual, and totally discredited "ex-gay" therapies?

Jim, you don't mean to be a voice for intolerance, but your anti gay rhetoric really does lead to death. I spoke at the memorial service of a 23 year old gay Southern Baptist singer who was kidnapped, humiliated, and shot 29 times because he was "a faggot and worthy of death." Two weeks ago a man from my home town was tied up, stabbed 10 times, and left to die with his throat and genitals slashed. In Los Angeles County, gay men are now the number one victims of hate crimes.

What do you have to do with this brutal and murderous hate? Is there a one to one connection between what you say and someone's urge to kill? Yesterday, just minutes after a radio talk show host in Colorado Springs read your July 14 letter to me on the air, two different callers exclaimed, "Somebody ought to go up there and kill him."

I know you get death threats, too. But your death threats don't come because you've talked about Jesus, or preached the Gospel, or given wise counsel to your listeners (as the Focus of the Family charter clearly implies). Your death threats come because of your covert (and sometimes overt) call for intolerance against this imaginary "militant homosexual agenda." My death threats come because I call for tolerance and love and understanding for my gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgendered brothers and sisters. We disagree about homosexuality, Jim. It's OK to disagree. That right is guaranteed us both. But what can we do before your militant fundamentalist agenda leads to terrible consequences for us and for this nation?

This is all I ask. If there are homosexuals who do evil, remember there are heterosexuals who do evil as well. We don't talk about the "militant heterosexual agenda" just because there are heterosexuals who produce pornography, molest children, carry diseases, and participate in destructive and dehumanizing sexual acts. Don't blame millions of innocent gays and lesbians for the evil done by a few.

Come to the Cathedral of Hope in Dallas, Texas. Meet thousands of lesbian and gay Christians who live together in loving, long-term, monogamous relationships, who parent children with skill and understanding, who are doctors, lawyers, university presidents, secretaries, nurses, pastors, priests, and hair dressers, who serve their nation in all branches of the military with honor, who are living with HIV/AIDS with courage and Christian grace. Ask your own friends and employees who are gay, to come out of their closets and tell you the suffering your rhetoric causes them. Jim, whether you agree with homosexuality or not, we lesbian and gay Christians exist. In the name of Jesus, we ask you to stop your anti-gay rhetoric. Your words and your political actions are killing us.

Sincerely, Mel White

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(Daily Fast, cont. from Pg. 8)

Later that day, Mel White was the only guest on a two hour, live, call-in talk show over KOA-Denver, a 50,000 watt radio station that is heard in 38 states. At 10:30 PM Mel was joined on Channel 11 TV by the Reverend Nori Rost, pastor of Colorado Spring's Pike Peak MCC Church, for a debate with two Focus on the Family officials. Given the last word, Mel White looked at John Eldredge, the Focus Vice President who is a leader in this anti-gay movement by radical religious groups "to end gay rights forever" and said, "This is not just about gay rights. It is about human rights. Sincere or not, these men and their allies on the radical right are trying to superimpose their fundamentalist moral agenda on the entire nation. And that should be scary for us all."

The highlight of this long, productive, seventh day of the fast was an interfaith service led by Nori Rost at the Pike's Peak Metropolitan Community Church. After enthusiastic singing by the overflow congregation and the choir, after prayer and reading of the Scriptures, after Mel's sermon on "The Importance of Friendship In These Troubled Times," Pastor Rost led the congregation in communion.

The service ended, Mel, Gary, Nori, Samuel, and the others who had fasted with them broke their fast and headed for a bowl of soup at a nearby cafeteria. En route, Mel said quietly to this reporter, "At communion, I asked Jesus to forgive me for anything I had said or done during this past week of confrontation that did not reflect His loving spirit. It isn't easy to confront someone like James Dobson. He is my brother. I will be misunderstood and condemned by him. Very likely," he added after a pause, "through his broadcasts and mailings, I will be misunderstood and condemned by millions of others. But I am convinced that what he and his friends are saying and doing to end the rights of gays and lesbians in this country is morally and spiritually wrong. I can't be silent."

As Mel and Gary left the church for their first meal in seven days, a P-FLAG mother with tears in her eyes grasped Mel's arm and said, "We're so grateful that you came to Colorado. My son died from AIDS. He was wonderful Christian boy, but people at our church rejected him because he was gay. They wouldn't even come to his funeral. When you stand up to the people who think like that, you honor my son's memory."

[A complete record of Dr. White's 7 day Fast for Understanding, including the 13 page charges against Dobson and Focus on the Family, a complete record of the correspondence between Dobson, Focus, and Dr. White, the Fast "Dairy," and a 5 page summary of the secret Glen Eyrie meeting by leaders of the radical right "to plot the end of gay rights and to eliminate homosexuality," can by obtained by sending $15. to the Dean's Fund, Cathedral of Hope MCC, P.O. Box 35466, Dallas, Texas, 75235. After printing and shipping charges are covered, profits go to help pay off the expenses of the Fast for Understanding. Dr. White, adds, "if this sounds like an offering appeal, so be it."]